

# Sibling Rivalry

[fyi.uwex.edu/parentingthepreschooler/](http://fyi.uwex.edu/parentingthepreschooler/)

## Tips to Help Siblings Get Along

- Encourage siblings to express their feelings about one another with words. "I feel sad when you take my toy without asking."
- Teach children how to get attention from their siblings in a positive way, such as asking to play together. "I'm building a block tower. Do you want to help?"
- Focus on each child's unique strengths. The behaviors you notice and talk about are often the behaviors children learn to repeat.
- Don't take sides. Try to stay neutral when children are having a conflict.
- Create a space where children can have quiet time and space if they need it. Teach all family members to respect these "quiet time" spaces.
- Try to spend alone time with each child every day. Sometimes children start a fight to seek attention from adults. Just 15 to 20 minutes of one-to-one attention with a child per day can decrease whining and fighting.



## Benefits of Sibling Rivalry

Conflict is natural in close relationships like families; and sibling rivalry is nearly unavoidable. Learning how to resolve conflict with siblings provides a great opportunity for children to practice interpersonal skills, which will continue to benefit them in future relationships.

# Celebrate the Individual

Sibling rivalry can start when adults make comparisons between children (“Why can’t you be quiet like your sister?”).

Comparing children is like comparing apples to oranges—you can’t! Instead, recognize, accept, and enjoy children’s distinct characteristics and achievements. Let each child know that they are special in their own way.



## When Should Adults Help?

- Step in when children cannot solve the conflict on their own.
- You should stop dangerous fights immediately to protect children from getting hurt physically and emotionally. When children have cooled down, talk about what happened and emphasize that violence is not allowed in any circumstances.
- Come up with some ground rules with your children. Make sure that ground rules contain clear and consistent consequences if children break the rules. This can lead to prevention of many arguments.
- Ground rules might include:
  - ◊ No hurting (hitting, kicking, pinching etc...) is ever allowed.
  - ◊ When one child is not having fun, rough-housing must be stopped.
  - ◊ If you fight over a toy, the toy goes into time-out.

## Resolving Conflicts

Give children opportunities to try working out their own conflicts, but keep in mind that younger children might need some help from you on problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Once everyone has cooled down, you might ask each child to think of several ways to solve the problem. For example, instead of telling the child to “Ask nicely for the toy,” ask, “What can you do or say so your brother will let you play with his truck?” Sometimes that’s all a parent needs to ask. For other conflicts, you may need to help children think through how their actions made their siblings feel and identify different actions that would make everyone feel better. “How does your brother feel when you grab toys?” “Can you think of something different to do so your brother won’t feel mad?” This problem-solving approach can benefit children in the long term because children are more likely to carry out their own ideas and develop problem-solving skills.

## UW-Extension Family Living Programs

"Raising Kids, Eating Right, Spending Smart, Living Well"



For more information, please contact your county UW-Extension office:

<http://counties.uwex.edu/>

[Link To References](#)

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